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MEU (HA/DR):
Shaping the World with Civil Military Engagement

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TITLE: The Evolution of the Marine Expeditionary Unit

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THESIS: A future strategic asset for the United States is a MEU specifically designed to respond to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief crises, and to conduct civil military operations and shaping missions, while maintaining combat capability. This MEU (HADR) will be a theater engagement resource for the respective Combatant Commanders to project a positive image of the United States on the micro level, allowing the Department of State to build upon these relationships to exploit macro opportunities.

DISCUSSION: The U.S. Government has the opportunity to exploit its success in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief missions. It can do so by developing units capable of handling the spectrum of conflict, but specifically tailored to perform humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions. By doing so, it can preempt future wars by shaping the global areas that are vulnerable to instability. This strategy would shape the environment over the course of decades, by building partnerships with countries based on mutual interests. The unit best suited for this evolution is the MEU because of its ability to rapidly respond to a variety of missions -- it already possesses many of the capabilities needed to most effectively accomplish the mission.

CONCLUSION: A MEU Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief will provide the national command authority a flexible and responsive capability that projects a positive image of the United States by capitalizing on unique strengths of the military, and specifically, the U.S. Marine Corps'.

INTRODUCTION

On 26 December 2004, media broadcasts were flooded with reports of tsunami-ravaged areas in Southeast Asia. These graphic images and initial estimates of the human death toll and catastrophic property damage captured the world's attention. As the days passed, the tragedy unfolded before our eyes as the casualty estimates escalated from a couple thousand, to tens of thousands, to hundreds of thousands. What appeared to be an isolated incident became a broad-ranging catastrophe that impacted thousands of communities and directly affected nine countries. By the end of the year, US forces from around the globe were being mobilized to offer support to the effected countries. Eventually, the US established Combined Task Force – 536 (CTF-536) in Thailand, with the Marine Corps' III Marine Expeditionary Force's Commanding General as the CTF Commander. The Operation became known as UNIFIED ASSISTANCE. Two Marine Expeditionary Units (MEUs) were diverted from their scheduled routes to provide assistance, which included subsistence, medical support, light engineering and extensive debris removal. The US military did not work in isolation; they were one part of a multi-faceted effort that included the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Private Organizations (PVOs), and other agencies.

The US military's, specifically the US Marine Corps', relief effort was not the only operation of its kind in which US Marine forces were involved. Over an 18-month period, the Marine Corps responded to the tsunami in Southeast Asia, the earthquake in Pakistan, Hurricane Katrina in Louisiana, and a typhoon in the Philippines. The global natural disasters of 2004-2005 illuminated the point that the Marine Corps is more than just a military service called upon to conduct combat operations. The Marine Corps proved that it had evolved into a rapidly deployable expeditionary force called upon to respond to the world's natural disasters, in

addition to conducting combat operations. The Marine Corps possesses the most responsive means to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) to effected areas, and the MEU's organic capabilities make it the Marine Corps most rapidly deployable Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) best postured to execute the assigned missions.

The increasing range of missions executed by the military is ever on the rise and raises the question, "What is the best use of the MEU as it relates to the nation's national military strategy?" The MEU has been a strategic asset since its inception. As the United States attempts to validate the military's roles and resource expenditures, the U.S. Marine Corps must constantly assess and reassess the value it provides to our nation. The Marine Corps' legacy and longevity will only be assured by capitalizing upon and enhancing those capabilities that provide the greatest value to our nation. The strategic threats the United States faces today are different than those faced by our nation when the current MEU/MEU(SOC) concept was first implemented. Some twenty years have elapsed, yet the MEU's missions, structure and utility have not significantly evolved: the MEU of today looks much like the MEU of the early 1980s. Change for the sake of change is never a good approach, but making changes after objectively assessing current capabilities in relation to current roles and potential opportunities is an inherent responsibility of our military's leadership. The MEU has played, and will continue to play, a substantial role in projecting the United States' power around the globe and responding to humanitarian crises around the world; however, the personnel and equipment required to most effectively execute these divergent missions is categorically different. The current MEU composition is designed principally to provide a flexible sea-based MAGTF capable of rapidly executing amphibious operations – it continues to work well.¹ But in order to respond to the

¹ Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Marine Corps Order 3120.9B w/CH 1: Policy for Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC))," Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington D.C., 25 Sep 2001.

next humanitarian crisis, as well as shape the environment for the future, a MEU tailored to mitigate human suffering and help communities in their recovery efforts has the potential to project a positive image around the globe, and ultimately facilitate future alliances and assistance that serve the United States' long term strategic interests.

According to international political analyst John W. Rendon, "The US military operation for Tsunami relief is the only strategic victory in the GWOT in four years."² The Navy-Marine Corps team has the resources and ability to hone this capability and take the fight to the enemy, but not in the traditional sense. We must begin to think differently -"outside the box"- if we are to effectively parlay our military capabilities and efforts into strategic, surgical wins. Creating a unit that systematically plans deliberate humanitarian missions, and is ready to respond to natural disasters while maintaining its combat capability fosters a synergy that could effectively and deliver a positive diplomatic message to the international audience. By doing so, the United States can position itself to better shape the areas most prone to future extremism. By building strong, consistent relationships with agencies outside of the military, such as the Department of State, USAID, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, apolitical humanitarian NGOs and PVOs; the Department of Defense (DOD) and US government can leverage the strengths of each agency to project the national strategy in a more positive image abroad. The MEU is the one organization in the United States arsenal that is unit best suited to become this diplomatic tool. Transforming the MEU composition into an organization specifically designed to address humanitarian assistance/disaster relief missions and foreign military engagement, without removing its capability to conduct combat operations, would make it a viable strategic response mechanism

² John Rendon of the Rendon Group, keynote speaker for the Conference on Culture and Adversary Modeling, sponsored by Air Force Office of Scientific Research, Joint Information Operations Center, and University of Texas at San Antonio, 30 November 2005: Quoted in Josten, Richard J., "Strategic Communication: Key Enabler for Elements of National Power," Joint Information Operations Center IO Sphere Sumer 2006.

for the United States. The “new” MEU would serve as a theater engagement tool to shape the Combatant Commander’s Area of Responsibility, which if applied properly during Phase 0 could mitigate the need for a greater application of combat force in the future (see figure 1). Although this may seem like a niche force is being created that can only accomplish one task, the new MEU would maintain the fundamental nature of today’s MEU while enhancing its ability to conduct humanitarian assistance.

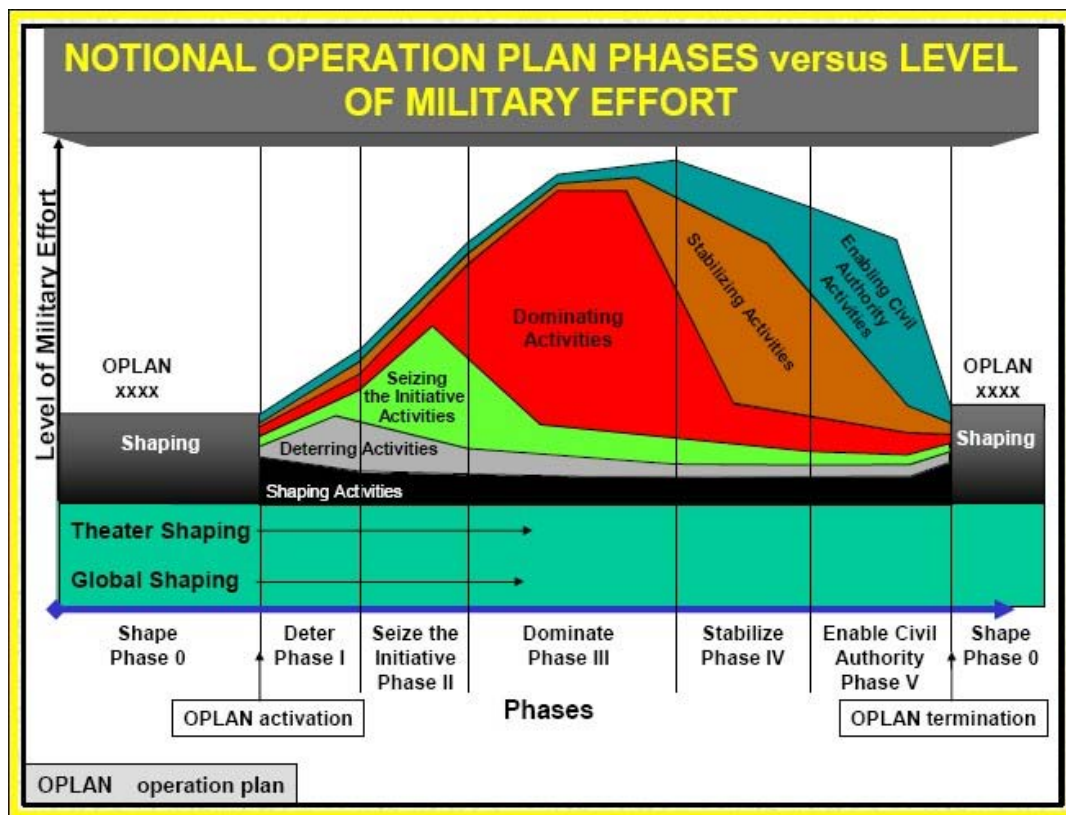


Figure (1) from JP 5-0: Joint Operational Planning, IV-35

HISTORY OF THE MEU

The Marine Corps' doctrine of the 1950s established the MAGTF as the preeminent force structure, with the MEU being the smallest of the four MAGTFs officially established in 1962.³ Over time the name changed from MEU, to Marine Amphibious Unit (MAU), to MAU Special Operations Capable (SOC) and finally to MEU (SOC). The present-day MEU (SOC) had its genesis in 1983 in response to the Secretary of Defense's direction that the U.S. military improve and increase its special operations capabilities. In order to meet this special operations requirement the Marine Corps instituted an aggressive SOC training program to optimize the capabilities of the MEUs, which were known as MAUs at the time, to conduct selected maritime special operations.⁴ The MAU (SOC) and then MEU(SOC)s were designed to be self-sustaining combined arms teams capable of responding to a range of missions.

BEYOND THE KINETIC - US MILITARY OPERATIONS

Effectively employing units with the primary mission of humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and non-combatant evacuation operations takes the Marine unit out of the traditional mind-set of kinetic operations. This may prove to be the way U.S. forces effectively counter terrorists, insurgents and other rogue non-state actors, who are able to marginalize our kinetic strengths. In a phrase, we can beat them at their own game. Humanitarian assistance is an opportunity to engage and gain access to otherwise inaccessible countries, or those that are reluctant to participate in military-to-military operations with the U.S. for political reasons. Not only does it "open doors", but humanitarian missions, whether it be re-building schools, painting hospitals,

³ Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Marine Corps Order 3120.3: The Organization of Marine Air-Ground Task Forces," Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington D.C., 27 Dec 1962.

⁴ Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Marine Corps Order 3120.9: Policy for Marine Expeditionary Unit (Special Operations Capable) (MEU(SOC))," Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington D.C., 28 Mar 1994.

giving medical attention or pulling teeth, show Americans at their best. Even though the participants wear uniforms, the recipients view the help as that of the American people, not necessarily that of the military. They like us, or they at least like what we can do for them. Because of the positive outlook and press that surround such operations, they should be given priority as missions, and cease relegation to the “sidelines” in favor of other more kinetic missions.

Civil military missions may not seem be what the military has traditionally done, but they may be the most effective use of our military. These missions are often viewed as distractions when developing and training our combat troops, but in this era of counter-insurgency, success in combat missions does not necessarily build all of the partnerships needed. Developing mutually beneficial partnerships can prevent the rise in insurgencies that intend to do harm to or exploit the populations within unstable countries, particularly those countries in Africa, South East Asia and Latin America. These targeted civil military operations are the foundation for shaping the future environment so it is favorable to the United States. While at the same time the forces can present the good will of the American people and provide needed structures or services to the people living in these unstable areas.

Although it appears difficult for the impatient American to understand, there is merit in participating in operations that do not bring immediately tangible results, but instead plant the seeds to win the battle a decade, or even a generation from now, a task that requires strategic patience. These types of operations are how we counter the ideological support for terrorism. Countering this ideological support is where victory lies, and the U.S. military needs to leverage such encounters. Humanitarian assistance missions can shape the battlefield for the future so that when given a choice, the population or government of a nation supports the U.S. and her

allies instead of the extremist group that espouses anti-U.S. propaganda, or makes empty promises. The U.S. needs to shape the future so that it is not enmeshed in constant combat with nations we know little about. The US must engage in preventive actions in the outlying areas of Africa, South East Asia and Latin America before we find ourselves embroiled in combat operations in those same areas. People from other nations may not like the U.S. or even want U.S. personnel within their borders, but it is difficult to find an individual that does not respect the humanitarian actions of the U.S. military. This respect can, and should, be leveraged and exploited to our advantage to the greatest extent possible.

MARINE EXPEDITIONARY UNIT (HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE /DISASTER RELIEF)

MEU (HA/DR)

The 2005 Quadrennial Defense Review re-categorized the nation's national defense challenges and identified the separate, but overlapping strategic mission sets: homeland defense, war on terror/irregular warfare, conventional campaigns, and deterrence (global, transnational and regional).⁵ The Navy/Marine Corps team was identified as the force of choice to best meet the on-going demand for a force capable of fostering and strengthening emerging and existing alliances. The United States can further exploit this ability to shape the environment by utilizing the Navy/Marine Corps team's capabilities to conduct theater engagement with a uniquely tailored MEU that has an enhanced capability to conduct Humanitarian Assistance/Disaster Relief (HA/DR) and civil military operations, having the ability impact theater security. This exploitation can be accomplished by task organizing the Navy's and Marine Corps' capabilities

⁵ Secretary of Defense, "Quadrennial Defense Review 2005," Department of Defense, Washington D.C. 2005.

into integrated force packages designed according to the needs of the Combatant Commanders and their component commanders, not unlike how the MEU (SOC) was first envisioned.⁶

The MEU (HA/DR) would be the United States' strategic asset for humanitarian crises and theater shaping around the globe, while maintaining the ability too execute amphibious operations. It will respond to unforeseen, and rapidly unfolding natural disasters; however, it would not be a collection of committed, but under-utilized assets and resources. Instead of awaiting the next major catastrophe, the MEU (HA/DR) would conduct civil military operations in the form of Medical / Dental / Veterinary and Engineering Civil Affairs Projects (MEDCAP/DENCAP, VETCAP and ENGCAPs) as a means to establish relationships and shape theaters. These missions would also be a critical aspect of the military's counterinsurgency and/or counterterrorism platform. In conjunction with civil military operations military to military training is still a key theater engagement tool. It is an important aspect of shaping, especially since some militaries have a tremendous amount of influence within their societies and it is an important leverage point to harness to our advantage.

The MEU (HA/DR) will be designed to address humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions that specifically focus on medical care, rudimentary construction and repair of public facilities. A byproduct of this theater-level strategic engagement is that a positive image of the U.S. is exported abroad, and most critically, that the targeted areas are those susceptible to extremist movements. It will strengthen ties with our allies and also serve as a theater engagement building block that may mature into military-to-military training, and eventually into robust political and military relationships with countries that today appear "out of reach". This relationship development can be seen in Thailand where military forces have conducted

⁶ Chief of Naval Operations and Commandant of the Marine Corps, "Naval Operations Concept 2006," Washington D.C., 2006.

increasingly broader exercises, to include humanitarian assistance, for over 20 years. The relationship that developed was a key factor in Thailand allowing some of those same units to return and establish the Operation UNIFIED ASSISTANCE CTF Command Center. In fact, buildings, constructed by U.S. forces utilizing Title X Exercise Related Construction (ERC) funds, were used as the command and control center for the Tsunami relief effort.⁷

THE SPECIFICS

It is time for the next generation in the MEU's evolution. The current MEU composition is a versatile combat force. This organization should continue to be a center-piece of the Marine Corps' forces provided to the Combatant Commanders. The MEU (HA/DR) is another step in the evolution, and an embrace of the Marine Corps' expeditionary culture. Currently there are seven identical, or at least conceptually identical, MEUs. This assumes that one configuration will meet the needs of all Combatant Commanders (COCOM), when in fact, each respective Combatant Commander faces different challenges in different regions. The MEU (HA/DR) will provide a theater engagement resource for the COCOM. The roles of the MEU (HA/DR) and the MEU (SOC) will be the same but the emphasis will be different (see figure 2). The MEU (SOC)'s mission is to provide the Combatant Commander with a sea-based, forward deployed MAGTF capable of rapidly executing Amphibious Operations, MAGTF Operations ashore in both traditional and irregular environments, and enabling operations in support of the Joint Force and SOF.⁸ The proposed mission of the MEU (HA/DR) would be to provide combatant commanders with a rapid response humanitarian assistance and disaster relief force capable of

⁷ Learn, Col T. USMC(CTF-536 Chief of Staff), personal interview, 7 Dec 2006.

⁸ Deputy Commandant, Plans, Policies & Operations, "MEU(SOC) Update," Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington D.C., Jul 2006.

conducting military-to-military training and civil action as well as Amphibious Operations ashore in both traditional and irregular environments, and enabling operations in support of the Joint Force.

MEU Missions

Current*	Revised*	Proposed MEU HA/DR Missions
1. Amphibious Assault	1. Execute R2P2	1. Execute R2P2
2. Amphibious Raid	2. Conduct Amphibious Raid	2. Conduct Amphibious Raid
3. Amphibious Demonstration	3. Conduct Amphibious Assault	3. Conduct Amphibious Assault
4. Amphibious Withdrawal	4. Conduct SASO	4. Conduct SASO
5. Direct Action Operations	5. Conduct Foreign Military Training	5. Conduct Foreign Military Training
6. TRAP	6. Conduct HA/DR	6. Conduct CMO
7. Security Ops	7. Conduct NEO	7. Conduct HA/DR
8. HA	8. Conduct TRAP	8. Conduct NEO
9. HEO	9. Conduct Limited Expeditionary Airfield Operations	9. Conduct TRAP
10. Peace Ops	10. Conduct Airfield/Port Seizure	10. Conduct Limited Expeditionary Airfield Operations
11. CI	11. Conduct Joint/Combined Enabling Operations	11. Conduct Airfield/Port Seizure
12. Fire Support Planning, Coordination & Control in a J/C environment	12. Develop Intelligence	12. Conduct Joint/Combined Enabling Operations
13. Limited Expeditionary Airfield Operations		13. Develop Intelligence
14. Terminal Guidance Operations		
15. Enhanced Urban Operations		
16. Enabling Operations		
17. Airfield Port Seizure		
18. Deploy Non-lethal Weapons		
19. Tactical Deception Operations		
20. Information Operations		
21. NSR (NSC) (Sight SCAMP)		
22. Anti-Terrorism		
23. R2P2		

Missions Unique to MSOC'
 13. Direct Action
 14. Special Reconnaissance
 15. Foreign Internal Defense (w/o language training)
 16. Counter Terrorism

*From: Deputy Commandant, Plans, Policies & Operations, "MEU/MSOC Update," Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington D.C., Jul 2005

Figure 2

The mission and nature of the MEU(HA/DR) may on the surface appear to limit the flexibility of the MEU, but it will enhance and add civil military capabilities, which increases the Combatant Commander's spectrum of theater engagement opportunities; this requires table of organization and equipment modifications. Although its primary mission is to provide assistance, the MEU (HA/DR) would also serve as a conduit for gathering information and sending thematic messages, as well as exploiting public affairs. In order to accomplish the stated

mission most effectively, the MEU (HA/DR) would require low density resources and specialized capability sets not currently resident within the MEU. Some of the personnel needed for a restructured MEU (HA/DR) would be experts in deliberate engineering, civil affairs, psychological operations and veterinary sciences. All of these experts would be Army or Navy units and/or individuals permanently assigned to the MEU(HA/DR).

The MEUs are already undergoing a change to reflect the formation of the Marine Corps Special Operations Command (MARSOC). One consequence of this change is that only six MEUs will be Special Operations Capable instead of seven: this leaves one without the additional designation and capability.⁹ The MEU designated to go without the SOC designation is the 31st MEU. Due to its critical location, composition of forces, and its 48-hour tether, it is the MEU that is best-positioned to transform into a MEU (HA/DR). In addition, it already deploys each cycle with at least one MEDCAP/DENCAP and ENGCAP as part of its exercise schedule. However, in order to address most of the world's critically vulnerable areas it would be advisable to station a MEU (HA/DR) on Okinawa, as well as the East and West Coast, giving each COCOM the strategic asset to shape their Area of Responsibility.

STRUCTURE OF THE MEU (HA/DR)

The structure of the MEU (HA/DR) will differ from today's MEU. It will still employ the Marine Air Ground Task Force (MAGTF) concept, and thereby still take full advantage of the combat potential of an integrated team.¹⁰ Although called a MEU, it will not look like the MEU (SOC) of today. It will be structured around the Combat Logistics Element (CLE), which

⁹ Deputy Commandant, Plans, Policies & Operations, "MEU(SOC) Update," Headquarters Marine Corps, Washington D.C., Jul 2006.

¹⁰ United States Marine Corps, Marine Air-Ground Task Forces (MAGTF)

will have two Humanitarian Assistance companies; one focused on engineering, Navy and Marine Corps, and the other on health services. There will be an Air Combat Element (ACE) consisting primarily of assault support, a Ground Combat Element (GCE) primarily tasked with providing security, power projection and military to military training, and a Command Element (CE) providing command and control as well as managing the information operations and civil affairs campaign (see figures 3 and 4).

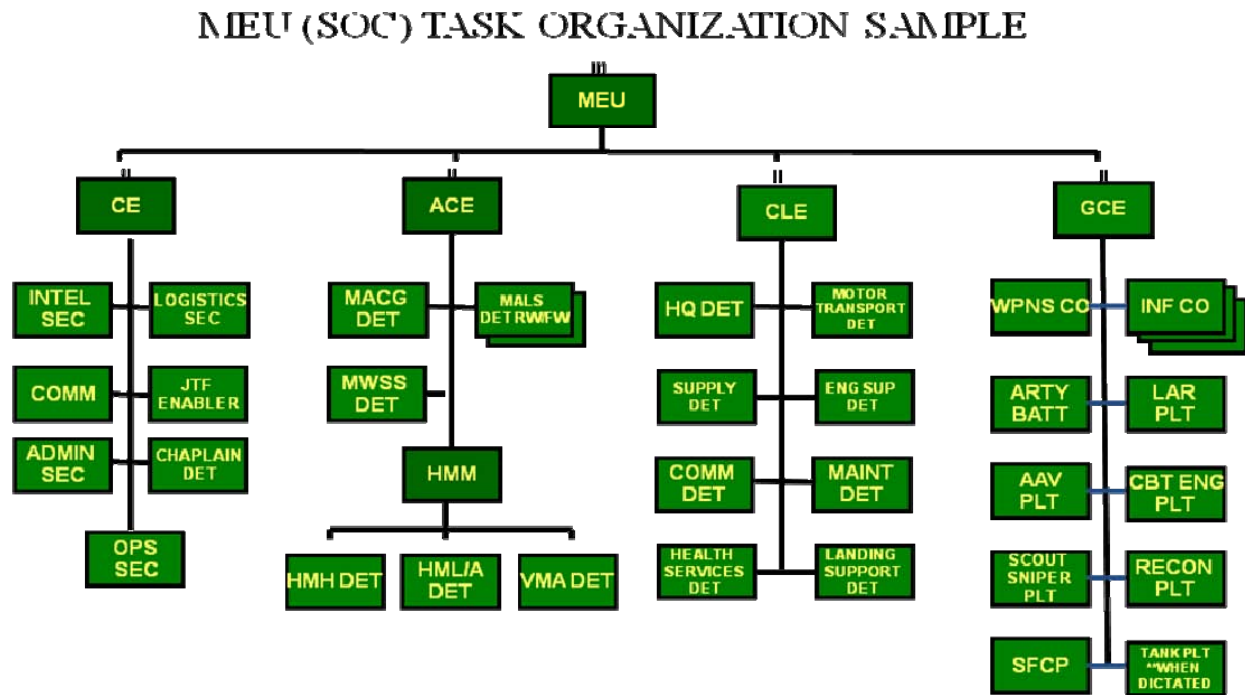


Figure 3

MEU HA/DR TASK ORGANIZATION

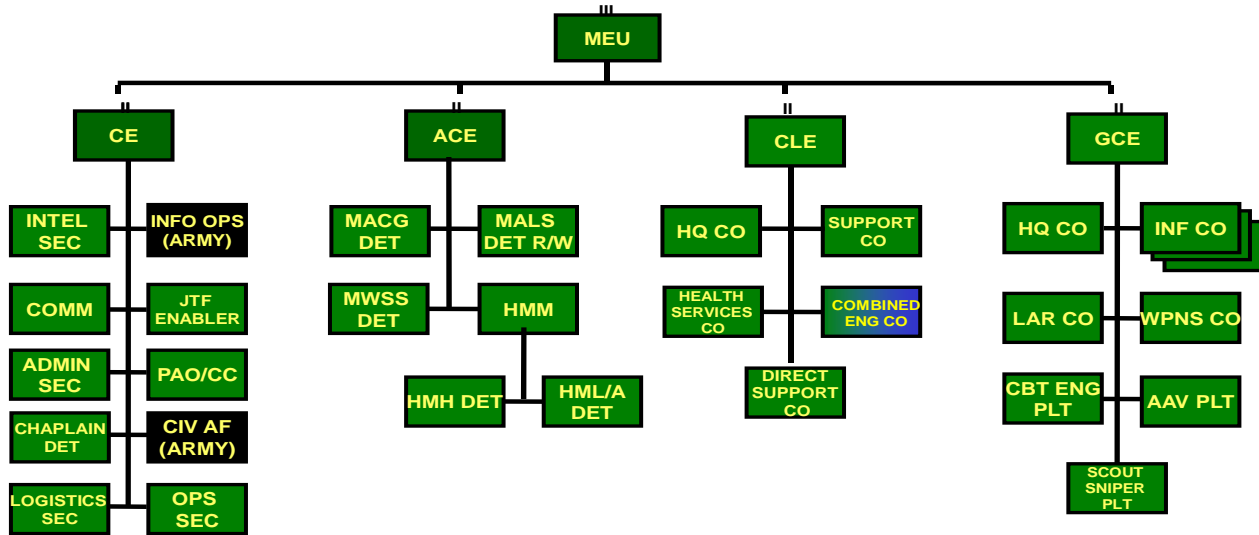


Figure 4

Due to the combat logistics nature of the MEU (HA/DR) it should be commanded by a logistician colonel, who could provide insight and command to the nuances of humanitarian assistance and disaster relief missions -- missions that rely on the experience and expertise of logistics operators. The Executive Officer (XO) should be an infantry officer, bringing a diversity of knowledge to the unit that would ultimately enhance the integration of the MAGTF team. Because the presence of three MEU (HA/DR)s does not answer the global need, the remaining MEU(SOC)s will have a higher priority placed on the primary missions of the MEU (HA/DR).

It would be beneficial for the Commanding Officer (CO) or XO to have experience working with non-DOD governmental agencies or with non-DOD entities -- particularly USAID, NGOs and/or PVOs, because of the potential resources other governmental and non-governmental organizations could provide to enhance the effectiveness of the unit. The

experience would position the CO or XO to establish relationships and contacts with organizations that must effectively integrate into the framework of each operating scenario or crisis. Although focused on humanitarian assistance, the MEU cannot become so niche that it is out of touch with the Marine Corps and traditional Marine Corps missions. Even with a priority placed on Humanitarian Assistance, Disaster Relief and Non-Combatant Evacuation Operations, the MEU (HA/DR) would still be required to be proficient in all 12 revised MEU missions/capability sets, as well as have the ability to conduct Civil Military Operations.

TRAINING

In order for the newly evolved MEU to be truly effective the training and associated Special Operations Training Group (SOTG) evaluation or “SOC certification” needs to be updated. How realistic is it to get 6 disjointed missions within a 4 day period with 6 hours to plan each mission, while being evaluated by your successor? There is no realism in the current evaluation system. Training needs to be realistic, progressive, involve true civilians, and have credible evaluators. We need to divorce ourselves from a scenario that is too “scripted”. The training needs to be viewed in a holistic manner, instead of a series of exercises with a definitive finish line. The training needs to be continuous and incrementally challenging, meaning, it needs to start prior to or at D-180 and it should continue until the forces arrive back at home-station from a deployment.

The training should integrate Department of State, Country Teams, USAID, NGO and media personnel at a minimum. Some training needs to be focused on the external organizations the MEU (HA/DR) will most likely encounter during crises which will provide an opportunity to learn the capabilities and limitations of each. Pre-deployment training should include an exercise

incorporating the non-DOD players in full spectrum scenarios: for example a USAID representative needs to do an assessment in a remote village. US forces have to escort him to the village, the convoy is ambushed, the assessment is done, a MEDCAP is employed, the situation deteriorates and a NEO is performed.¹¹ Although comprehensive and complex an evaluation of this nature would not be the final exercise. While underway, a training exercise should include at least one planned MEDCAP on foreign soil. The intent would be to meet with the Country Team and develop the situation far from Camp Pendleton, Camp Lejeune, Camp Hansen or Guam. This would exercise our capabilities while forming and/or strengthening relationships with DOD and non-DOD agencies, as well as foreign governments and/or militaries. These off-base exercises would also provide an opportunity to integrate the medical and dental personnel from the ARG, PHIBRON and Hospital ships-which should be integrated into exercises on a yearly basis. All of these progressive exercises provide sustained training for MEU personnel in realistic scenarios without the checklist mentality. This MEDCAP requirement could be utilized by the Combatant Commander as an engagement opportunity to shape his area of geographic responsibility, targeting areas of declining stability or strategically positioned islands or landmasses.

These changes in the training cycle will only strengthen the abilities of the MEU(HA/DR) and accompanying agencies once a natural disaster occurs. Some natural disasters are beyond the physical capabilities of one MEU(HA/DR), so at least every two years, the MEU(HA/DR) should train to provide the nucleus of the follow-on Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) while enabling that force to enter via a port or airfield. This would exercise the command and control of the MEB in a disaster relief scenario. Not only does this prepare MEUs

¹¹ Greenwood, Col T.C. USMC, personal interview, 11 Dec 2006.

to work in the context of a larger military force, it exercises the MEB's capability to create a scalable force. The MEB would bring in a more robust Civil Military Operations Center (CMOC) to coordinate with the broad range of institutions involved in the relief effort.

DEPLOYMENT OF THE MEU (HA/DR)

The MEU (HA/DR) will bring flexibility to the theater. Because there will be a limited number of MEU (HA/DR)s, they will have the capability of being inserted by multiple methods. The primary method of insertion will be by naval amphibious shipping. Having the MEU (HA/DR) as part of a multiple ship Amphibious Ready Group (ARG) tied into a larger Expeditionary Strike Group (ESG) will allow the MEU (HA/DR) to conduct split ARG operations. This will stretch the operational reach of the ARG to two distinct locations and/or missions, giving the national authority the ability to respond to two crises simultaneously. The disadvantages of naval shipping are that its availability is determined by shipping and maintenance schedules, so it cannot be employed 24/7/365. The distinct advantage of amphibious shipping is its capability to have 15 days of sustainment, while at the same time it offers the opportunity to house personnel involved in operations if restrictions prohibit, or forces are limited from bedding down in a country at night, such as was the case in Banda Ache, Indonesia during the tsunami relief. In addition, naval personnel possessing critical skills could participate in civil military operations, specifically medical and dental personnel, and linguists if they are present.

The MEU (HA/DR) must have multiple deployment methods because it will be a low-density resource. It must be a force that can deploy the right personnel and equipment mix to the right place, in the shortest amount of time. The method best suited for this quick surgical

deployment is Strategic Airlift; however, the reliability and accessibility of this option means it cannot be the primary means of deployment. The disadvantages are that an operational airfield may not be in close proximity to the disaster due to inherent infrastructure networks or the degraded capacity or capability due to the disaster and lift limits the amount of equipment and relief supplies that can be flown in a timely manner.

The third method of deployment, which would offer the least flexibility unless already pre-positioned near the point of disaster is the ships of the Maritime Pre-positioning Squadrons (MPS). The personnel of the MEU (HA/DR) could fly-in and marry up with the equipment of the MPS. The advantage is that the MPS has with it a large footprint of supplies especially useful in an environment where a natural disaster may limit the ability to procure supplies, especially fuel. The disadvantages are that MPS ships are not ideally configured for humanitarian assistance and disaster relief so multiple ships may require off-load to reach the equipment necessary to conduct the mission. The nature of MPS shipping is such that it may already be engaged in an exercise or operation or it may be too far away to be realistically feasible as an option, especially if the disaster is in a remote area that requires the use of tactical aircraft. In addition, MPS requires a robust port facility or an adequate beach area to operate.

Training to the use of all three methods of deployment provides the greatest flexibility for implementation. Up-to-date plans and training will allow the national command authority to employ the right force, at the right time, by the right method. It also allows a response to include a variety of methods with a scalable response capability.

CONCLUSIONS

Theater engagement has historically been something the military does when it is not otherwise engaged – it has not been a priority. However, in order to make significant gains in the war against extremist ideologies, the military and the nation need to shape the environment so that the United States is not surprised when the next terrorist/insurgent movement flares up in a country we had the opportunity to peacefully engage when the costs were minimal.

The MEU (HA/DR) will provide the national command a flexible and responsive capability that projects a positive image of the United States. While doing so, it capitalizes on the strengths of the military services and provides a unique solution to counter an emerging threat. It allows the U.S. to shape the potential theaters of engagement through benign operations, which produce lasting and worthwhile results.

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